WHAT IS THE FOOD INDUSTRY DOING ON NUTRITION PROBLEMS?*

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I DO not have to explain to any of you what has occurred in the past few years regarding malnutrition in the United States—not only among the poor but essentially at all socioeconomic levels. The fact that this has happened is not too surprising, but the fact that we have allowed it to happen incriminates all of us as scientists and professionals devoted to the health of the nation. In the past there have been no real attempts to monitor the nutrition of our population; rather, there has been a general complacency. If we *had* done this, we should not have outmoded laws and regulations today, and traditionalist statements that are even now preventing the food industry and concerned scientists from doing many of the things that have been recommended and are necessary. For instance, a petition has been submitted to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for an increase in the fortification level of iron in flour. No one knows when this level will be specified and what the final level will be. The additions could be made right now, but the product could no longer be called "flour"—but would you believe it?—"imitation flour"!

One would think that with all the individuals and groups who are sincerely trying to do something we could move off dead center—and that the problems would be easily solved. However, today we seem to be suffering from pollution of communication. Today the food business is everybody's business. Never before have spokesmen and leaders of so many segments of our society taken such an interest in good health. Even the meaning and the implications of the word "nutrition" depend upon whom you ask. For instance, before a recent Congressional committee one witness testified that cereals lack sufficient nutrients. A scientist from Harvard University said cereals are nutritious, and a govern-

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ment scientist says there are too many nutrients added to some cereals. All of this, of course, has led to a real dilemma for the consumer. If we professionals are confused, how do you think the layman feels!

As far as what the food industry is doing, some progress has been made: more soft drinks that are being substituted for breakfast drinks by the consumer have been fortified with vitamin C; most flour-based mixes now use enriched flour; other products, such as instant potatoes, are being fortified to equal the raw equivalent. But these are only a very few positive steps compared to what should be done.

One major problem, I believe, is that a high degree of conflict exists amongst scientists as to what should or should not be done—and an almost complete lack of cohesiveness among the groups that could do something or cause something to happen.

Consider the dilemma of the food industry on the whole question of atherosclerosis. We are told: "Use more polyunsaturates in your food." The American Heart Association has published lists of foods that should or should not be eaten by patients with cardiovascular disease or high cholesterol levels; yet when we request information as to what ratios of saturates to polyunsaturates we in the industry should use, no one will give us a definite answer; we are offered ranges of from 1:1 to 1:3, while other experts state: "Don't do anything. Make people exercise more and cut out smoking—the problem will then resolve itself." Further, if at this point in time we attempted to label the fat composition, we should be investigated by the FDA.

Further pressures are exerted on us by customers who cannot understand why we do not put all information on the label. Additionally, we must consider the effects of sucrose in this area. If we use sucrose, should we also include some chromium? We are further concerned by the results of the Framingham study. What does it all mean?

What I am trying to say is that the industry is willing to do what is right—but when and how are we going to determine a proper, rational course of action? I must point out that the food industry is not lily-white in the malnutrition problem. We have known for some time, through menu-census studies, that the eating habits of the American public have been changing drastically. There are very few families that eat three meals a day—there is more skipping of meals and snacking, and many more people are eating one huge meal a day—which raises other problems!

We need information on what effects in percentages we can get by just changing the types and percentages of fats in the diet. What per cent from exercise, from cutting out smoking and, possibly, what per cent by eating four or five meals a day instead of one large one? An article in the August issue of *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* entitled "Meal Frequency—A Possible Factor in Human Pathology" showed that the frequency of eating certainly has a marked effect on the physiology of the mouse, rat, chick, rabbit, and monkey—and undoubtedly on man. The industry desperately needs two things at this time:

First, a national nutrition policy. It is ironic that when we have gone into underdeveloped countries, this is one of the first things we require.

Second, we need guidelines—but guidelines that are amenable to change as more data become available, and a concerted effort on the part of researchers to change laws and standards, while keeping in mind that protests from a few persons can tie up changes in standards for long periods.

Further, the industry will have a difficult time without a great deal of support. It is willing to do, and capable of doing, whatever is necessary to our food supply to ensure better health and nutrition—but we also need assurances that what we are doing is right.

In our company we have begun a substantive program, particularly in the areas of protein, iron, and vitamin C as they relate to our products. We have done this because we feel strongly that the food industry must emphasize research and testing to ascertain the nutritional value of food products when they are consumed as well as when they are processed and packaged. It is simply inadequate to list on the label the nutritional ingredients of a product and, in so doing, delude oneself that the consumer has been told everything he needs to know. This of course is not easy because money alone will not solve the problem any more than money has cured cancer. But we have accepted the challenge. I am not implying that every food product loses a substantial amount of its nutritional value from the time it is processed until it is eaten by the consumer: I am saying merely that we—all of us in the food industry—in many cases really do not know. What we are doing is finding out if there has been any loss, and then learning how to restore a lasting nutritional content.

One area that I know is of interest to all of you is the labeling of

food products. As you may know, a labeling task force has been formed by the Grocery Manufacturers' Association to work jointly with the FDA to develop meaningful methods of labeling the nutrient composition of food. This is not an easy task, since we must do it in a way that is intelligible to relatively illiterate people. This will require a great deal of study and creative thought, since the labeling must be simple enough to be easily understood as well as meaningful. There are additional complications that must be considered. I am now referring to the eating-out segment of the food industry. About 35% of all meals are now eaten away from home; and it is estimated that by 1980 this will amount to about 50%. I think this segment of the industry will have to accept its responsibility to communicate the nutritional value of the food it prepares and serves. However, to be effective this system must be compatible with the ultimate system devised for packaged products. We feel that we have a responsibility in our fast food-service business to ensure that its clientele, when they order one of our recommended meals, receives from that meal at least the 25% of the Recommended Daily Allowance for vitamins, minerals, calories, and protein as established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences. This parallels our responsibility of ensuring that the products we make that replace a meal also contain the essential nutrients that would have been contained in that meal.

We must—and are—studying all our food products from the standpoint of who eats them, with what, and when. From these data certain of our products will be modified, if technically feasible, so they will contribute properly to the requirements of meals. This, of course, will be a scientific approach that will assure those who have no deficiencies that the change will absolutely cause them no harm.

The food industry cannot wait until we are told by political forces to do something. Now is the time to do it voluntarily, and with a sense of obligation to our fellow man. We also believe it is our obligation to communicate effectively the health and nutritional value of the food we sell, and if this means changes in advertising concepts—so be it. We are committed to this change.

These same concepts must be followed by the nutritional and medical profession or we shall find laws passed that may actually be contrary to the best interests of the public: changes not based in fact, on scientific fact. We must all realize that there will have to be communication and

an understanding that the physician, the marketing man, the scientist, and the professional communicator have a common mission. We must stop sniping and putting the blame on others. We must begin to develop a constructive approach to better nutrition and more nutritious food products. By being in the business we are in, we have accepted responsibility for the health and nutrition of the nation. Let us show the world that we do accept this responsibility—and let us do it with responsible, cooperative action!